

AN  
IMAGINARY HISTORY  
OF THE  
AMERICAN THEATRE  
FROM 1890 TO 1900.

BY "PROSPERO."

"The hour's now come ·  
The very minute bids thee ope thine ear ;  
Obey, and be attentive."

NEW YORK:

APRIL, 1890.

# Ex Libris

SEYMOUR DURST

*t' Fort nieuw Amsterdam op de Manhatans*



FORT NEW AMSTERDAM



(NEW YORK), 1651.

When you leave, please leave this book  
Because it has been said  
"Ever'thing comes t' him who waits  
Except a loaned book."

AN  
IMAGINARY HISTORY  
OF THE  
AMERICAN THEATRE  
FROM 1890 TO 1900.

BY "PROSPERO."

---

"The hour's now come :  
The very minute bids thee ope thine ear ;  
Obey, and be attentive."

---

NEW YORK:

APRIL, 1890.

042 7162 BOX 83

AVERY ARCHITECTURAL AND FINE ARTS LIBRARY

GIFT OF SEYMOUR B. DURST OLD YORK LIBRARY

## DEDICATION.

---

To the entire theatrical profession, but more particularly to the humble toilers, to neglected talent wasted in obscurity, to the bright young men and women who are willing to learn but can find no teacher, and to those whose efforts to serve the art they love are hampered by a selfish, mistaken system which rewards the fortunate few at the expense of general progress and prosperity :

I offer you this hopeful dream as a consolation, as one narrates a fairy tale to a discontented child ; but as some fairy tales contain the germs of truth and wisdom, so this book may lead you into thoughts and actions that will dispel the darkness and reveal the light. If I have made many mistakes, if I have exaggerated present evils, and seemed blind to the brighter side of things, I ask your pardon ; in condemning what is done badly, I only seek to illustrate what might be done well.

There may be some of you, perhaps many, who would wish to see this imaginary history realized. If the greater number of you feel that co-operation will make your labors more productive and your lives happier, and if such co-operation will benefit the public and is not forbidden by the laws of our country, who can prevent you from joining hands and standing up against any power that may oppose you ?



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2014

## PREFACE.

---

LIKE many other vocations, the stage is apparently overcrowded because not well patronized,—full of many failures amid a few brilliant stars of success. The same laws that oppress the laborer affect the artist, and we all know how much there is in this world that seems dreadfully wrong and unjust. The cry that the few rich are becoming richer, and the many poor are growing poorer, seems to be based on facts. The power of monopolists and corporations is beginning to terrify thoughtful men. The corruption that exists among those in high positions, the many suicides that occur, the increased bitterness of the struggle for existence, all this makes us think that the political, social, and moral condition of the world is not what it should be. Some of us have gone through the bitter struggle, and are perhaps in a position where we can be independent and careless about these questions; but if we will not consider the thousands about us who are less fortunate, we ought to think of the children we may have, and if we can make their struggle easier than ours is, our lives will have had some purpose. We all think alike in regard to present evils that exist among us; we all hope to see the day when men throughout the world will be friendly with each other, when war will be looked upon as murder, when the maintenance of an army and fleets of steelclad ships stocked with death-dealing weapons, shall be regarded as a barbaric custom, and an unnecessary expenditure of the people's money.

We hope to see the day when the poor-house and the jail will contain but a handful of wretches, when charitable organizations shall be displaced by schools where young men and

women will be taught how to work and how to live. And surely we hope, in the golden time to come, that the greatest vice of the nineteenth century, the drinking habit, will be checked and regulated. This may be accomplished when the natural craving of the nervous system shall be fed with something more healthy and beneficial than the fumes of alcohol. The saloon is the sponge that drains the money and manhood of thousands, and leaves them paupers and fools. But the poor man needs recreation and diversion, and he goes to the saloon because it is close at hand and cheap. If the library, the art gallery, the music-hall and the theatre were made as inviting and convenient to him as the saloon, he would not hesitate as to the choice. If for a comparatively small sum he could see a beautiful play finely acted, or hear a grand opera well sung, the saloon would lose his patronage and the theatre would gain it, while his family would be made happier. The stimulus for nobler enjoyment would cause art to flourish, and the demand would inspire the supply. The theatre as an instrument of recreation and amusement, if placed within the reach of the masses, would achieve glorious results for their education and morality.

To lower the cost of art without cheapening its quality, that has been proven impossible under the present system of theatrical business, but it is not impossible if that system is entirely changed.

The imaginary history which I now submit\* may throw some light on a question that concerns us all; and as actions are born of dreams, so ideas which seem Utopian, if handled by brave men and women, may bring about the change we all desire.

---

\* I need make no apology for presenting this book to actors and managers, because I am sure the subject is worth writing about; but as to the writing itself, I fear I owe an humble apology to the reader for my barren language and crude style. I am no author and have no pretensions to literary ability, and besides, the book was written under the pressure of haste, as I wished to have it printed and circulated before the general closing of the theatrical season.



# AN IMAGINARY HISTORY.

---

## CHAPTER I.

"The drama, that polished amusement which is numbered among the fine arts, which poetry, music and painting have vied to adorn, to whose service genius has devoted her most sublime efforts, while philosophy has stooped from her loftier task, to regulate the progress of the action, and give probability to the representation and personification of the scene."—WALTER SCOTT.

THE stage has always been a subject of interest, and its history has ever been popular with the general reader. The most civilized race of ancient times, the Greeks, loved the theatre and cultivated the dramatic art so extensively that the common people were thoroughly acquainted with the drama, and fully able to criticise and appreciate it. When literature had lain dead for centuries, and at last awoke with glorious strength in the England of Elizabeth, the theatre was recognized by Shakespeare and his followers, as the fittest medium in which to ventilate their genius. When Germany produced Lessing, Goethe and Schiller, the theatre again was the instrument that played the music of these inspired souls. In the nineteenth century, while Victor Hugo was creating the romantic drama of France, Walter Scott wrote an essay in praise of the drama. And in more modern days, Charles Dickens, the most popular genius of his time, though he felt himself better equipped as a novelist than as a dramatist, never ceased to express his love for the theatre and his admiration for the actor's art. Many volumes have been written on the subject of the drama, and if this little history purposed to speak on the same well-worn subject, it could but feebly echo what has been better said by others. But the author has no such intention, he merely will speak of the great change that has occurred during the last ten years (1890-1900) in the method of providing theatrical amusement for the people. This change

has been so beneficial for the public, the actor, and the art itself, that a brief history of how it arose, and how it came to be adopted, may be welcomed by those interested in the subject. As the discouraging condition of the theatre, financially and artistically, was what inspired the abandonment of old methods for new ones, it will be necessary to state what this condition was.

The theatre in 1890 was not very extensive, and its patrons comprised only a small portion of the public. The gross receipts during the year 1889 for theatrical amusement in the United States amounted to about \$15,000,000; the prices of admission ranged from 25 cts. to \$1.50, and the average price was 75 cts., indicating an attendance of 20,000,000. Thus of a population estimated at 60,000,000, one-third visited the theatre once a year, and the average amount expended by each man, woman and child was 25 cts. per year. This seems a very small amount to devote to that lovely art generally regarded as one of the highest forms of enjoyment, but the reasons for this meagre public support were plainly apparent. The theatre, instead of being enjoyed by the masses as in the days of civilized Athens, was a luxury for the few, and debarred from the many on account of its high price. This high price resulted from an expensive and mistaken business system which was injuring not only the theatre, but the entire commercial world. The principal vices of this system were individualism and competition, the enemies of harmony and combined strength. In Edward Bellamy's great work "Looking Backward" these evils were attacked in so sensible and forcible a manner as to create an unusual stir among many classes, and as much of what he said applied directly to the business system of the theatrical profession, certain extracts taken from his book may be consistently presented here. Bellamy, looking backward from the golden year 2000 to our dark, threatening age, says:

"What shall I eat and drink and wherewithal shall I be clothed?" stated as a problem beginning and ending in self, had been an anxious and an endless one. But when once it was conceived, not from the individual, but the fraternal standpoint, 'what shall we eat and drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?' its difficulties vanished. The fear of want and the lust of gain became extinct motives, when abundance was assured to all and immoderate possessions made impossible of attainment."

"Competition, which is the instinct of selfishness, is another word for dissipation of energy, while combination is the secret of efficient production, and not till the idea of increasing the individual hoard gives place to the idea of increasing the common stock, can industrial combination be realized, and the acquisition of wealth really begin."

"Their misery came from that incapacity for co-operation, from the inability to perceive that they could make ten times more profit out of their fellow-men by uniting with them, than by contending with them."

"The umbrella illustrates the old way when everybody lived for himself and his family. There is a nineteenth century painting in the art gallery representing a crowd of people in the rain, each one holding his umbrella over himself and his wife, and giving his neighbors the drippings, which must have been meant by the artist as a satire on his times."

"It is easier for a general up in a balloon, with perfect survey of the field, to manœuvre a million men to victory, than for a sergeant to manage a platoon in a thicket."

"A regiment was passing. Here at last were order and reason, an exhibition of what intelligent co-operation can accomplish. The people who stood looking on with kindling faces—could it be that the sight had for them no more than a spectacular interest? Could they fail to see that it was their perfect concert of action, their organization under one control, which made these men the tremendous engine they were, able to vanquish a mob ten times as numerous? Seeing this so plainly, could they fail to compare the scientific manner in which the nation went to war with the unscientific manner in which it went to work? Would they not ask why the killing of men was deemed so important a task that a trained army should be deemed alone inadequate, while the feeding and clothing of men was left to a mob?"

"The folly of men, not their hard-heartedness, was the great cause of the world's poverty. It was not the crime of man, or of any class of men, that made the race so miserable, but a hideous, ghastly mistake, a colossal world-darkening blunder."

I have said these extracts from Bellamy applied to the system of theatrical business, and to justify my statement, I will now describe the former mode of providing amusement for the public.

## CHAPTER II.

"Some people are busy, and yet do nothing ; they fatigue and wear themselves out, and yet drive at no point."—MARCUS AURELIUS.

IN 1889 there were some 300 companies, composed of about 5,100 persons, engaged in theatrical business. These companies were divided into four classes, viz., 50 first class artistically and financially, 75 second class (artistically mediocre, financially fair), 75 third class cheap prices (artistically bad, financially fair to disastrous), 100 second-class attempts and caterers to country towns (artistically bad to pitiful, financially hand-to-mouth). They were all, with a few exceptions, under separate management, each attraction being a piece of theatrical property to be disposed of to the public, for the profit of its owners.

The managers were merchants, and their stock of goods was an entertainment which the public paid a certain price to witness.

As each manager possessed only one kind of entertainment, and as theatre-goers formed but a small portion of the public, a paying patronage lasted but a short time in one city for a single attraction, and the manager would then remove his property to another city, where he again presented his entertainment to the theatre-goers, and after having exhausted their patronage, once more moved on to places not yet visited.

The average length of these visits was one or two weeks in the larger cities, and one to three nights in small towns.

The cost of moving these companies over the country amounted to about \$750,000 annually, being 5% of the gross receipts of \$15,000,000. This railroad expense taxed the profitable companies much more lightly than their less successful business associates, as it frequently happened that three companies had the same railroad expense, though their receipts widely differed. Three companies, carrying the same number of people, and covering the same territory, would pay each about \$200 weekly, and their gross receipts would amount to \$8,000, \$5,000, and \$3,000. Thus the percentages paid the rail-

roads were  $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ ,  $4\%$ , and  $6\frac{2}{3}\%$ , the least profitable of the companies being taxed the heaviest.

It was not unusual for a less important company in playing towns one night each, to have a travelling expense of \$150 weekly, with average receipts of \$1,500, which gave the railroad 10%.

This travelling system by which the railroads received 5% of the money expended by the public for amusements was unavoidable, as theatrical property was so divided by individual ownership that the only way to reach the public was to carry the goods to be sold from town to town, like a peddler vending his little stock over an extensive field.

It was necessary, as a matter of course, that each company should plan its route long before starting on its journey, and this "date-booking" process required much forethought and knowledge, though with uncertain attractions it was more in the nature of a speculation. It constantly happened that some company had contracted to play in a certain theatre a given period, but the business would prove bad in that particular house, and the lengthened stay unprofitable; as the time, however, had been agreed upon, the loss had to be borne, and it usually fell most heavily on the company.

Again, where good fortune befell an attraction a longer stay would have been profitable, but others having engaged the time beyond and the company having bound itself elsewhere, it was compelled to relinquish the profits close at hand.

As the important cities throughout the United States were so widely apart, the expense of travelling could only be reduced by playing in the smaller towns on the way, though these towns could hardly furnish sufficient patronage to make the visit of a large company profitable. If any accident or delay occurred during a long trip, the destination would not be reached in time, and as a result the company would miss a night's work, which caused a loss, as when a merchant is compelled to close his store, being deprived of his income for a day, and his employees suffer enforced idleness in consequence.

Many miscalculations occurred involving a waste of capital and energy, and much confusion resulted from competition and individual effort, because those engaged in the same industry had no knowledge of their associates' movements, and no desire to work in concert with them. Instead of gaining the public's patronage economically and harmoniously, it was fought for expensively and antagonistically.



## CHAPTER III.

"The walls of the buildings, the windows, the broadsides of the newspapers in every hand, the very pavements, everything in fact in sight, save the sky, were covered with appeals of individuals who sought, under innumerable pretexts, to attract the contributions of others to their support. However the wording might vary, the tenor of all these appeals was the same: 'Help John Jones. Never mind the rest. They are frauds. I, John Jones, am the right one. Buy of me. Employ me. Visit me. Hear me, John Jones. Look at me. Make no mistake, John Jones is the man and nobody else. Let the rest starve, but for God's sake remember John Jones!' Whether the pathos, or the moral repulsiveness of the spectacle, most impressed me, I know not. Wretched men, I was moved to cry, who, because they will not learn to be helpers of one another, are doomed to be beggars of one another from the least to the greatest. Were these serious men I saw about me, or children, who did their business on such a plan?"—EDWARD BELLAMY in "Looking Backward."

AN expense as great as that of railroad travel, was the advertising in newspapers, and the displaying of all sorts of pictorial printing in places most likely to attract the notice of the people.

The annual cost of advertising the various attractions was about \$750,000, being another 5% of the total receipts of \$15,000,000. It was necessary to inform theatre-goers about the entertainments to be presented, and the regular announcements in the daily papers placed this information within the reach of all. The people were apparently willing to expend \$15,000,000 for their amusement, and it was only necessary to enlighten them as to the form of entertainment, and the price of admission, leaving them to choose according to their taste.

Had only this mode of advertising been indulged in, the cost would have been about 1% of the gross receipts instead of 5%, but this simple method was not possible when the attractions were divided among many owners, each of whom was working for his own interest, and seeking patronage for his property alone. Every device was made use of by the manager of each company to draw the public, not to the theatre in general, but to the particular entertainment in which the manager was interested, and as a result the quantity of advertising was largely increased, and the style of conveying information ab-

surdly exaggerated. Not only were the newspaper advertisements extended, but lithographs and show-bills were distributed about a city, in store windows, on buildings, boards, in fact wherever they could be easily seen. As these pictures and glaring sheets were scattered about without any regard to their surroundings or position, they were usually mere eyesores to intelligent people, and only served with other advertisements of soap, patent medicines, etc., to mar the beauty of the city's thoroughfares.

There were indeed a few of the curious and unthinking who might be induced by the startling nature of some of these prints to visit the entertainment, but the public in general were well aware of the inaccuracy and self-laudation that pervaded this form of advertising, and looked with indifference or contempt upon the frantic efforts of managers to persuade theatre-goers, that they alone possessed the "greatest American play" or the "most popular American actor." The really meritorious attractions required but little advertising, as the good impression they made was circulated by their audiences; but many managers possessed property that failed to please, and made no impression that could be depended on to secure continued patronage, and in their endeavors to make their business profitable they would announce in all forms of extensive advertising, how very successful their entertainment was, hoping by this falsehood to draw that class of auditors who rush to see what the most hubbub is made about. Many plays were kept before the public by the glamour of their advertisements, more than by any merit deserving of success, and bad actors were puffed and praised for commercial reasons, the occasional lance of an honest critic having little effect on their hard hides. To be known and talked about, to have reputation in quantity (its quality was a second consideration) and to have one's name as much as possible in theatrical circulation, all this had a commercial value as advertising matter, though of course it was indulged in chiefly by the vulgar pretenders and disliked by sensible artists.

But advertising and self-praise were practised more or less by all classes, not because men were vain or desirous of deceiving the public, but because competition compelled merit to battle against pretension with its own weapons.

## CHAPTER IV.

“To some she is the goddess great,  
To some the milch cow of the field ;  
Their care is but to calculate  
What butter she will yield.”—SCHILLER.

“‘Work must be done, and some one must be at the top, some one at the bottom.’ Granted, my friends. Work must always be ; and captains of work must always be. But there is a wide difference between being captains or governors of work, and taking the profits of it. It does not follow, because you are general of an army, that you are to take all the treasure, or land, it wins ; neither because you are king of a nation, that you are to consume all the profits of the nation’s work.”—JOHN RUSKIN.

WE have said that the various companies were with a few exceptions under separate control. These exceptions consisted of about 15 managers who were interested in more than one company or theatre, and in the gradual growth of these larger interests, it was evident that the theatrical business was soon to be burdened with that same system of monopoly which had already spread itself through the industrial and commercial world. The 15 managers controlled about 40 companies and 50 theatres (consisting mainly of the most important and valuable) averaging 6 enterprises each. As each of these six companies or theatres had the advantage of co-operation, and worked harmoniously with instead of competitively against each other, they were for the most part financially successful, and the 15 managers grew rapidly wealthy. This apparent virtue of monopoly is spoken of by Mr. Bellamy : “Oppressive and intolerable as was the regime of the great consolidations of capital, even its victims were forced to admit the vast economies effected by concentration of management and unity of organization, and that since the new system had taken the place of the old, the wealth of the world had increased at a rate undreamed of. To be sure this vast increase had gone chiefly to make the rich richer, increasing the gap between them and the poor ; but the fact remained that, as a means merely of producing wealth, capital had been proved efficient in proportion to its consolidation.”



Though it was not generally thought that monopoly had spread itself to any great extent in the theatrical business, it had really assumed vast proportions, when we consider the amount of business done by the few, compared to the many. Add to the above-mentioned 15 managers, the 5 most important (financially) of theatrical "stars," and estimating the business done by this group of twenty, we discover that the gross receipts of their enterprises amounted during the year to about \$7,500,000, or in other words one half of the entire theatrical receipts (\$15,000,000) was controlled and its profits shared by 20 men.

Among these eminent twenty were several managers who with the five theatrical "stars" were entirely worthy of the financial success they enjoyed; these managers considered not only money but art, and had gained an honorable reputation by handling attractions of high excellence, while the "stars" were actors whose talents upheld the dignity of the theatre, and delighted the public. If their financial reward seemed too large compared to that of the great majority, it was no fault of theirs, but simply the result of that freedom which encourages individual effort regardless of others, instead of combined effort for the benefit of all. But though these worthy managers and stars were not begrudged their reward, there were others among the twenty who did not deserve the large profits which came to them. They were not theatrical managers according to the true definition, that is, one who conducts the business affairs of a theatre or company, and who, by exercising the practical, aids and protects the artistic element. On the contrary, the sole purpose of these men was financial gain, without regard or respect for art. To them the theatre was a shop for the sale of goods, the play was the merchandise, and the actors were the instruments used to help make the merchandise attractive. Though their money-making ability enabled them to gather a financial harvest for themselves, their utter lack of artistic conscience was a serious injury to the health and progress of the drama.

## CHAPTER V.

“Thus man pursues his weary calling,  
And wrings the hard life from the sky,  
While happiness unseen is falling  
Down from God’s bosom silently.”—SCHILLER.

“There must be classes—there must be rich and poor” Dives says, smacking his claret—it is well if he even sends the broken meat out to Lazarus sitting under the window). Very true; but think how mysterious and often unaccountable it is, that lottery of life which gives to this man the purple and fine linen, and sends to the other rags for garments and dogs for comforters.”—THACKERAY.

IN Chapter II. we mentioned the classes into which the 300 companies were divided, and spoke of 100 as “second-class attempts and caterers to country towns (artistically bad to pitiful, financially hand-to-mouth).” As this description seems rather harsh, we will explain more fully about the theatres in the many small towns, and the companies who played there.

With few exceptions the theatres were rude halls, with small stages, comfortless alike to the auditor and actor; in a few towns some philanthropic citizens of wealth had erected fine theatres, but the vast majority of small towns could not boast of any place at all suitable for theatrical entertainment. The managers of these theatres were for the most part engaged in some other business (dry goods, hats, shoes, books, etc.) as the theatrical business was too small and unimportant to deserve much of their attention. In consequence of this, many of them were not managers at all, and knew very little about theatrical affairs, their only object being to get a profitable rental out of their buildings. As their expenses were very moderate (the furnishing of orchestra, stage accessories, etc., being usually wretched and inadequate), they would book many more companies than could possibly find patronage, and the loss resulting from this mixture of stupidity and selfishness, fell almost entirely on the companies, whose share of the small receipts did not cover their expense.

As to the companies who visited these towns, what can be said? They were the very poor (financially and artistically) of

the profession, unable to get a footing in the larger cities, as Bellamy says of the small tradesmen: "Existing in fields too small for the great capitalists, reduced to the condition of rats and mice, living in holes and corners, and counting on evading notice for the enjoyment of existence."

These humble companies, composed of 1,200 toilers, had in their ranks much real talent, but it was cut off from the world, and through lack of opportunity frequently perished amid the obscurity where it began. Many of these strugglers were called "barn-stormers" and "play-pirates," because of their playing chiefly in theatres no better than barns, and because of their producing certain successful dramas that did not belong to them. This play-piracy was not a very serious offence, as the field which these needy companies occupied was so barren, that the owner of a really successful play seldom offered his property for sale there. The financial condition of these 100 country companies was deplorable; with little theatrical property in good plays, artistic strength in actors, or executive ability in managers, they for the most part barely succeeded in earning a precarious livelihood. Socially, their lives were "stale, flat and unprofitable" to a pathetic degree; exiled from the art influence of the large cities, relying for their encouragement on the ill-timed plaudits of country louts, oppressed by the solitude of a small town without enjoying its home comforts, what opportunity was there for personal happiness or intellectual advancement? Yet, among these 1,200 exiles were many artistic natures, ambitious souls, tender hearts, who vainly strove for light amid the darkness that surrounded them.

## CHAPTER VI.

"The sensual supply of sight and sound will cause an audience to grow too hard for sense and simple nature."—COLLEY CIBBER.

"Among the Romans the fine arts were introduced as a corrupting article of luxury ; they carried this luxury so far with respect to the theatre itself, that the perfection in essentials was sacrificed to the accessories of embellishment. The relation which Pliny gives of the architectural decoration of the stage erected by Scaurus, borders on the incredible. When magnificence could be carried no farther, they endeavored to surprise by mechanical contrivances. In the gratification of the eye, that of the ear was altogether lost.—SCHLEGEL.

"The instant that the increasing refinement or finish of the picture causes a loss of the faintest shadow of an idea, that instant all refinement or finish is an excrescence and a deformity."—JOHN RUSKIN.

THE theatres in the large cities were far superior to those in the small towns, and some of them were elegant and costly, situated in the most populous thoroughfares where real estate was most valuable and rent very high. The manager's share of the gross receipts usually amounted to about 50%, for which he furnished his theatre, musicians, stage hands, ushers, advertisements in the newspapers, scenery, properties, light, heat, etc. His largest expense was the rent of the building, which varied from \$10,000 to \$30,000 annually according to location, and as the theatres had no income during 15 weeks of the summer season, the rent amounted to from \$500 to \$700 for each week of the regular theatrical season.

Another great outlay was the expenditure for stage decoration, which was indulged in to such an extent that it frequently was entirely out of harmony with the work of the actor and dramatist. This expensive discord was brought about by the scarcity of good actors and dramatists; having little material in the way of good plays and actors, the managers sought to atone for the deficiency by a lavish display of scenery, etc., to please the eye if not the mind of the audience. It was generally recognized that excessive decoration is injurious to art, but the fault was old in the history of the drama, and it served to illustrate how luxury will corrupt and weaken art as well as men. The drama which attained its perfection among the

Greeks, was presented with the simplest surroundings; later on the Romans made it a spectacle and a show, and under that influence the art languished and died. When it arose after its sleep of a thousand years, it again reached its perfection while presented by Shakespeare and his contemporaries with rude, simple decorations; and later it met with the same injurious treatment as that which caused the decay of ancient art. What the Romans did with Grecian art, Davenant did with Elizabethan art; he made the theatre a luxury, and dressed the stage in such bright and gaudy colors, as to obscure and deform the true meaning and beauty of the drama.

However, the theatre in 1890 was not yet looked upon as in a state of decay, though many acknowledged the danger of the faults that burdened it, among which excessive decoration was only one. An eminent dramatist\* went so far as to maintain that the rude stage of Shakespeare ought to be returned to, but this view was regarded as unnecessarily extreme.

While the dressing of the stage was elaborate, the accommodations for the actors were neglected, and shabby dressing-rooms were the rule in the better class of theatres.† As to the average "opera houses" and "halls" in the small towns, they were simply barbarous and disgusting.

\* "I honestly believe it were better for the drama to return to the primitive condition of the Shakespearian period, where there was no scenery, where the poet relied on his power to conjure the scene."—DION BOUTICAULT in the *Dramatic Mirror*.

† "Your auditoriums are, as a rule, handsomer and larger than those in England; but such theatres as we have played in in this country have impressed me with their inadequacy behind the scenes. It seems to me that the convenience of those who work is not sufficiently considered. Most of the theatres we have acted in have been close, dirty, ill-ventilated, and I can't believe healthy. Of course, it is eminently proper that the comfort of the patrons of the drama should be carefully looked after, but I also believe that the artist should have some consideration paid to his wants and needs."—W. H. KENDAL'S "Impressions of America."

## CHAPTER VII.

“For ’tis a truth well known to most,  
That whatsoever thing is lost,  
We seek it, e. e it come to light,  
In every cranny but the right.”—COWPER.

“Although the pursuit of wealth is not favorable to intellectual life, the inconveniences of poverty are even less favorable to it.”—HAMERTON.

HAVING mentioned the chief features in the system of conducting theatrical business in 1889, we will now speak of the financial results of that system, leaving the artistic and social results to be discussed later. The heavy expense of rental of theatres, stage decoration, railroad transportation, and advertising, with the generally poor patronage of the public on account of high prices, made it impossible to pay good salaries to actors, and as the expenses alluded to were invariably paid before the actors, it happened naturally that the actors received what was left over. They realized the truth of the saying that “those who come last get least,” and it frequently happened after the expenses deemed more important than the actor’s work had been paid, that nothing at all was left for the actor. The company would then be discontinued, the actors received a “promise to pay” which was usually valueless, and after a period of idleness, they would again try their luck in an enterprise where the actor’s services were the most necessary, while the reward for those services was the least considered. When we remember that theatrical employment only existed during 30 or 35 weeks of the year, it can be safely said that the average income of actors and actresses was no larger than that of mechanics or even clerks, though the nature of their work was of a higher and more difficult order. The small salaries paid in America were nevertheless considered to be better than in other countries,\* though that supposition is questionable when

---

\* “When we hear of actors receiving £30, £40, or even £60 a week, it is as well to bear in mind that, while such salaries are not unknown, they are very exceptional. Some who read of such payments in the newspaper columns devoted to theatrical gossip conclude that they represent the ordinary remunera-



we observe the gradual reduction of the average American actor's salary, and the shortness of the working season.† There were indeed a select few of the foremost managers and theatrical stars whose profits were enormous, but their princely income only served to lower the general income.

The following statement will more clearly indicate the actual financial return for the actors' and managers' services:

Gross receipts in 1889, . . . . .	\$15,000,000
Expenses:	
Rental of theatres and appurtenances (50%),	\$7,500,000
Railroad fares and advertising (10%),	1,500,000
	<hr/>
	\$9,000,000
	<hr/>
	\$6,000,000
Estimated income of 40 leading people (20 managers, 15 theatrical "stars" and play-owners, 5 foreign artists), . . . . .	\$2,000,000
	<hr/>
Paid for the services of 5,100 actors and managers,	\$4,000,000
<hr/>	
The favored forty received \$2,000,000 at an average of \$50,000	

tion of the player. Such, however, is far from being the case. Even in London there are many theatres well frequented by the best class of playgoers where no such high terms are paid, and the instances are few indeed where more than one or two such payments are found together on the same salary list. The vast majority of actors ply their calling from youth to old age without attaining, and it may be said in most cases without any expectation of attaining, the receipt of £10 a week. Indeed, little more than half that sum may be considered as the average remuneration of theatrical labor in London, while on the provincial boards it ranges at even a more moderate figure still, and the big exceptions are there practically unknown."—*London Saturday Review*, February, 1890.

† We have supplemented our knowledge of the subject of salaries by data placed at our disposal by the leading dramatic agents of the city. Speaking generally, salaries are now no lower, so far as the best class of artists is concerned, than heretofore. But among actors of inferior grade—such as may be rated second and third class—there has been a uniform falling off, the average reduction being from one-fourth to one-third below the scale that prevailed three and four seasons ago. The tendency is to sustain the pay of good actors and reduce the pay of ordinary actors. As to length of seasons, the leading attractions play about the same number of weeks this year as during the past ten or twelve years. The principal stars act from thirty to thirty-five weeks, some even longer. The weaker attractions do not prolong their travels for terms of similar duration. Their tours depend upon their relative drawing powers. From twenty to twenty-four weeks is their usual length. To briefly sum up, it may be said that the strong stars and companies stay out as long as they wish, and that the weak stars and companies stay out as long as they can."—*New York Dramatic Mirror*, March 8, 1890.

each, making their weekly income during the 30 theatrical weeks of the year \$1,666.67; average weekly income throughout the year, \$961.54. The 5,100 actors and managers received \$4,000,000 at an average of \$784.31 each, making their weekly income during the 30 theatrical weeks of the year \$26.14; weekly income throughout the year, \$15.08.

Thus forty persons enjoyed an average income amounting to almost 63 times as much as that of their 5,100 associates in the theatrical business. It will be seen that the same great gap that separated the monopolist and the laborer, existed under smaller conditions in the theatrical profession. While the average actor was needy, shiftless, without a home, with a discouraging future, a very few of his associates were enjoying a splendid income. The favored few were not to be blamed for taking advantage of a business system which enriched them while it impoverished the great majority; they were simply taking the attitude held throughout the world by thousands against millions.

There were 300 companies averaging 17 persons each, composing 5,100 persons working about 30 weeks during the year. The value of their services at a reasonable estimate was, according to this salary list of 17 persons (9 actors, 6 actresses, 1 manager, 1 agent):

Leading man, \$100; juvenile man, \$75; comedian, \$75; heavy man, \$60; old man, \$60; character actor, \$55; 3 utility men, each, \$25; leading lady, \$100; juvenile lady, \$75; comedienne, \$75; old lady, \$50; 2 utility ladies, each, \$25; manager, \$100; agent, \$50. Total, \$1,000 weekly.

Average salary of each during 30 weeks, \$58.82; average salary of each throughout the year, \$33.86. At this estimate the 300 companies would have received \$9,000,000 for 30 weeks' work. We have seen, however, according to the financial statement of theatrical business in the year 1889, that the 5,100 actors and managers received for 30 weeks' work only \$4,000,000, so that the average salary list of each company (presuming all salaries to be really paid) was as follows:

Leading man, \$44.44; juvenile man, \$33.33; comedian, \$33.33; heavy man, \$26.67; old man, \$26.67; character actor, \$24.44; 3 utility men, each, \$11.11; leading lady, \$44.44; juvenile lady, \$33.33; comedienne, \$33.33; old lady, \$22.23; 2 utility ladies, each, \$11.12; manager, \$44.44; agent, \$22.22. Total, \$444.44 weekly. Average salary of each during 30 weeks, \$26.14; average salary of each throughout the year, \$15.08.



In the face of such small financial reward, and inclined by the nature of their occupation to be extravagant, improvident, and careless, it is not surprising that the actors were for the most part oppressed by that genteel poverty which causes suffering more deep and humiliating than that of the poverty-stricken masses throughout the country. It is doubtful if more than 500 (10%) of the 5,000 possessed each a sum as high as \$1,000 or more, and it is certain that fully 50% did not even possess a savings-bank book. Yet they were a light-hearted race withal, and if some of the men did not pay their tailor and board bills, or return the money they borrowed during the idle summer months, and if some of the women submitted to indignity and insult, all might have sought with good reason to explain their misconduct, by quoting the words of the starved apothecary who sold poison to Romeo—"My poverty, but not my will consents."

## CHAPTER VIII.

"To do anything well, may have more merit than we often meet with, and may be enough to procure a man the name of a good actor from the public; yet, in my opinion, it is but still the name, without the substance. If his talent is in such narrow bounds that he dares not step out of them to look upon the singularities of mankind, and cannot catch them in whatever form they present themselves; if he cannot change himself into several distinct persons, so as to vary his whole tone of voice, his motion, his look, and gesture, whether in high or lower life, and at the same time keep close to those variations, without leaving the character they singly belong to; if his best skill falls short of this capacity, what pretence have we to call him a complete master of his art?"—COLLEY CIBBER.

"Even of the Romans, who were but the imitators of the Greeks, Cicero tells us that the actors in general, for the sake of acquiring the most perfect purity and flexibility of voice, submitted to such a course of uninterrupted exercises as our modern players would consider a most intolerable oppression. The display of dexterity in the mimetic art without the accompaniment of words, was carried by the ancients in their pantomimes, to a degree of perfection quite unknown to the moderns."—SCHLEGEL.

"I could wish that our theatre were as narrow as the wire of a rope-dancer, that no inept fellow might dare to venture on it; instead of being as it is, a place where every one discovers in himself capacity enough to flourish and parade."—GOETHE.

"'Know thyself'! long enough has that poor 'self' of thine tormented thee; thou wilt never get to 'know' it, I believe! think it not thy business, this of knowing thyself; thou art an unknowable individual: Know what thou canst work at, and work at it like a Hercules! that will be thy better plan."—CARLYLE.

"To be a true artist is out of the reach of any but choice organizations—natures formed to love perfection and to labor for it; ready, like all true lovers, to endure, to wait, to say, I am not yet worthy, but she—Art, my mistress—is worthy, and I will live to merit her. You must not be thinking of celebrity, but look only at excellence. Whenever an artist has been able to say 'I came, I saw, I conquered,' it has been at an end of patient practice. Genius at first is little more than a great capacity for receiving discipline."—GEORGE ELIOT.

"We do not for a moment believe that science will make an artist. Not only the poet, but also the artist of every type, is born, not made. What we assert is, that innate faculty alone will not suffice, but must have the aid of organized knowledge. Intuition will do much, but it will not do all. Only when Genius is married to Science can the highest results be produced."—HERBERT SPENCER.

"The greatest actors are those who are both born and made, who have both

energetic intelligence and the histrionic faculty, and who in addition to the endowment of nature, are accomplished in all that the schools can teach."—BRANDER MATTHEWS.

WE now come to the artistic condition of the actor, and we find it not unlike the financial. As there were few successful actors and many poor and needy, so there were a small number of fine artists, and a great many incompetent and feebly endowed persons. The few good actors were composed of the older survivors of the stock-system with its educational advantages, and several hundred younger actors who, without having had the practical training in a stock company, acquired a certain excellence through their natural dramatic instinct aided by energetic study.

A few extracts may be presented, showing the general opinion among intelligent critics of the time.

"I have been in one theatre or another almost every night of my life for more than twenty years, and while I have seen there much that was noble, beautiful and impressive, I have also seen an aggregate of insipidity which cannot be reviewed without dismay."—WM. WINTER.

"I do not know what is to happen when Mr. Booth dies. I do not see a single gleam of promise in the skies for the elevation and ennobling of the stage. The cardinal trouble with the younger men of the American stage is their lack of application, their contempt for industry. Most of them come to the stage ill-prepared, and lack the strength and the impulse to overcome their deficiencies."—LAWRENCE BARRETT.

"We have much good acting in the rough, but little that reaches the imagination through the finer resources which it is given to the artist to see. Many a young actor with a manner worth cultivating has fallen into a mannerism hardened and made disagreeable by wrong methods."—EDWARD FULLER.

"The public throughout the length and breadth of the land has been nauseated with poor plays and silly rubbish, and an almost universal complaint is made that the stage at the present time harbors a great number of incompetent performers, whose ignorance and incapacity has degraded the art of acting to a lamentable degree."—*New York Dramatic Mirror*.

Perhaps the most striking change caused by the abandonment of stock repertoire companies, and the establishment of travelling companies with a single attraction, was the growing importance of the special actor of few parts, and the gradual extinction of the versatile actor of many parts.

Though specialism and versatility were both arts of such value that neither could be spared, the indications pointed to the decay of versatility, especially in England and America. The two foremost English actors (Henry Irving and Ellen Terry) were individual or special, and even the second in im-

portance (Mr. and Mrs. Kendal) were only versatile in the domain of refined society acting. In America, the two most eminent actors (Booth and Jefferson) had a limited repertoire, the two really versatile actors (Davenport and Warren) having passed away, one long since, the other but a year or two. In France and Italy specialism and versatility were still fairly divided with Bernhardt and Salvini in the former school, while Coquelin and Rossi graced the latter. Germany alone adhered to versatility in preference to specialism, and Possart, Sonnen-thal and Barnay played with equal ability in the light of comedy or the gloom of tragedy. In America there were two great actresses of versatility (Janauschek and Modjeska), but they were the products of a foreign school.

That the American stage in 1890 had many fine actors is evident when we look over the list of those (Lawrence Barrett, W. J. Florence, Charles Barron, Mrs. John Drew, Clara Morris, Agnes Booth and others) who, with Edwin Booth and Joseph Jefferson, were the ornaments of the art; but they all were graduates of the stock system, and more or less advanced in years.

The future of the stage lay in the hands of the younger actors, and as they had not the advantage of that system which helped to produce so many artists, the future of the actor's art appeared rather dubious and unpromising.

Though preparatory education is to a certain extent necessary in any occupation, experience and practice are no doubt the best teachers. In the stock days a young actor's experience of playing under traditional discipline a great number of small parts in one season, caused the exercise of all the varied instruments of expression, so that at the end of the first season he had at least finished his apprenticeship and acquired the first rudiments of his art. But when the stock system ended, this excellent school was closed, the young actor played but one or two parts in a season, and his apprenticeship often lasted five years or more. As a result of this slow rate of progress in education, the public who paid to see masters displaying their craft, simply witnessed players many of whom were getting their experience and learning their art. Having but a narrow field of exercise, and without the traditional knowledge gained by observing the rehearsals of many plays, they frantically struggled to do the best they knew how, and as their knowledge was very limited, they presented an aggregate of bad acting and misguided effort which was really deplorable.

This painfully lengthened apprenticeship had to be endured by the audience, whose protest would have been as consistent as that of a living breathing man on whom a medical student attempted to experiment, instead of using for his subject an inanimate carcass.

When the young actors' long if not substantial "lesson" was learned, they continued to play certain parts in which they gradually acquired the skill produced by constant exercise in a narrow field, and looked forward in the hope of proving worthy successors to the great actors of their time. But though they hoped to rival the great specialists, it was without the advantage of that broad education and experience from which the specialism of the existing great artists had sprung. If Booth's "Hamlet" or "Iago" seemed to be the perfection of specialism, it was because they resulted from a broad field of exercise, and if Jefferson's wonderful "Rip" stood alone in its excellence, it was yet the climax of effort founded on the varied labors of the stock system. Irving's best impersonations (Mathias and Louis XI.) were presented after the actor had played 500 different parts. We thus see that the individual excellence of these great artists resulted from their earlier versatile efforts, and as the younger actors had no opportunity for this earlier education, it did not seem likely that they could ever attain the excellence of their elders.

While the decline of versatility was especially noticeable, it was apparent that certain qualities of histrionic art were not cultivated to the extent they deserved. As voice and physical expression were the most important instruments of the actor, the agents of these qualities, elocution and pantomime, had fallen into disrepute. In England the foremost actors were not good readers, and in America Edwin Booth stood almost alone as the master of vocal expression. The perfection of his elocution illustrated the rarity of that art, and while there were many excellent actors to compare with him in general impersonation and conception of character, there were none who could approach him in poetical reading and vocal beauty, their fear of ranting and unnaturalness causing the faults of vocal weakness and cheap colloquialism. As to pantomime, which in its appeal to the eye so far eclipses painted scenery or gaudy costumes, that art seemed to have suffered a like neglect, the French and Italians (notably Salvini) being its best exponents.

Another fault (for weakness in any department of art is a



fault) was the lack of spirit and abandon, an undue amount of repression and an attempted impression of reserve power; this was caused by a general lack of knowledge when and how to act, and the fear of over-acting resulted in a large amount of under-acting.

As there were no schools for preparatory education where beginners might have undergone certain tests of ability, the stage was burdened by a large number of persons who had mistaken their vocation, and who were entirely unfitted for the actor's art. A training school was needed as a protection against the entrance of incompetency into the profession, and if only those graduated from such a school had been permitted to go on the stage, the result would have been most gratifying. But such a school could not exist without the financial support of the profession it protected, and as that profession was entirely composed of individual endeavor without consideration for general benefits, it was impossible to secure the necessary financial aid.

The one school that did exist in New York was a private enterprise, and though well conducted, it was very limited in its influence, being entirely dependent on those few pupils who could afford to pay a high price for their education. As the financial results of such a school depended on the tuition fee, there was danger of unworthy pupils being admitted for the sake of the fee, while real merit allied to poverty was excluded. One of the most grievous results of that liberty which enabled persons to enter an art without the diploma of ability, was the disporting of society amateurs, who possessing nothing but wealth, vanity, and sometimes the commercial advantage of notoriety, held high positions, and secured rewards that should have gone to deserving merit.

Having discussed the qualities of actors, we will turn to the companies most eminent, the four stock companies of America in 1890, one in Boston, three in New York. They were successful financially and artistically, and served to illustrate the value of that "stock" system which had been so generally done away with.

The Boston Museum Co. had indeed lost its chief power (Warren) but it was very capable in modern plays and contained considerable old and young talent. In New York the Daly Co. was admirable, perhaps unequalled in light modern comedy, though in any other field its efforts were hardly satisfactory. The Madison Square Co. possessed some fine actors

of the "old school," and though it was liable to injury from "long runs" of farcical comedy, etc., it probably stood first among the four in general ability. The Lyceum Co. was composed of some good material, and in the narrow field of modern society plays, it was excellent. As to versatility, not one of these four companies could compare with the German Co. that played at Amberg's Theatre during the season of 1889-90, and in combined artistic strength, they were far behind the stock company of the Berlin Theatre, the Burg Theatre of Vienna, or the Comédie Française\* of Paris.

While there were only four companies of importance, there were over one hundred "stars" who were featured as special attractions, and whose names were advertised far and wide. With the exception of about a dozen artists (who by the extent and value of their achievements deserved to be ranked above their colleagues), these "stars" were the result of vanity or commercial endeavor. Their feverish ambition was apparently inspired by the idea of Cæsar that it was preferable to be "first in an Iberian village than second in Rome;" but though a Cæsar was able to make such an ambition fruitful, it is hardly applicable to men who are not Cæsars. Certainly the power and influence of the first man of importance in a village is not equal to that of even the fiftieth man of importance in a great city. So there were "stars" well known in country towns whose names had never been heard in the large cities, and whose commercial endeavors did not amount to the income of a capable artist content to do his work without having his name in large letters. They did not seem to understand that, like William Warren, a man need be no "star," may remain in one city half a century, and yet die beloved and prosperous, leaving a name that will live when the names of many "stars" lie buried in merited obscurity.

---

\* "The répertoire courant—that is to say, the pieces which the Comédie Française company can play at any moment, all the parts being known beforehand, without any other preparation than a summary rehearsal—includes about one hundred plays."—FR. SARCEY in *The Nineteenth Century*, July, 1879.

## CHAPTER IX.

"The players, who in general do not concern themselves much about forms of government, and whose whole care is usually devoted to the peaceable entertainment of their fellow-citizens."—SCHLEGEL.

"We have seen that Athens, enthusiastic in her attachment to the fine arts, held no circumstances degrading which were connected with them. Æschylus and Sophocles were soldiers and statesmen, yet lost nothing in the opinion of their countrymen by appearing on the public stage."—WALTER SCOTT.

"Only those who know the supremacy of the intellectual life—the life which has a seed of ennobling thought and purpose within it—can understand the grief of one who falls from that serene activity into the absorbing, soul-wasting struggle with worldly annoyances."—GEORGE ELIOT.

WE have commented on the financial and artistic condition of the stage, and now let us turn to the social life, to the actors and actresses, not as artists and workers, but as men and women.

Probably their little world was not unlike the great world about them, with its contrasts of ignorance and intelligence, selfishness and generosity, coarseness and refinement. But it differed from the great world, which was generally domestic, while theirs was "bohemian." Whatever praises may be sung of "bohemianism," with all its attractions it can hardly be compared with domesticity as an element of sensible happiness and progressive social life. Though the artistic nature is sometimes apt to rebel at the apparently narrow regularity of domestic life, the common sense of men rebels more strongly against the unhealthy irregularity of "bohemian" life.

The actors, however, were "bohemian" not so much from choice, but by necessity; they were travellers during eight months of the year, and of course unable to adopt a domestic style of living.

To travel occasionally with a view of seeing the world, and after observing the ways and occupations of men in fields distant and different from ours, to turn with new ideas and stronger hope back to our own homes, that is truly delightful. But to be compelled year after year to traverse a certain terri-



tory according to a fixed time-table, and to be deprived almost entirely of the beneficial influence of home and society, that is a misfortune hard to bear and surely injurious to the morals and character of its victim.

If the lack of opportunity to play many parts caused indolence and killed ambition, so the travelling life caused carelessness in habits and weakness in morals. If there was a greater proportion of rakes in the theatrical profession than in any other, it was because there was a smaller proportion of married men; and what attraction had marriage for men who by the nature of their calling could not establish a home for wife and children? The actor's enjoyment of society was chiefly confined to the followers of his own profession, not so much because of the unjust social prejudice against them that still existed, but because the actor's short stay in any particular place made it impossible for him to form any lasting ties of acquaintanceship.

In spite of the many disadvantages which encumbered the general progress of the actor, there were still some cultured minds, enthusiastic natures and ambitious lovers of art, who stood forth as eminent exceptions to the rule, but it must be admitted that a considerable number of the actors were entirely unworthy of their high calling, and utterly oblivious to the dignity and importance of their work. Ignorant, coarse-grained, selfish and profane, deeply concerned in horse-races, prize-fights, or a tale of bawdry, they knew and cared little about art, literature, science or politics, while intellectual endeavors and refined enthusiasm for the drama were favorite objects of their stupid ridicule. With no love or respect for their profession, they simply regarded it as a means of livelihood; had they been able to make as much money with as little work in some other occupation, they would have turned to it without regret.

As for the actresses, the matured women, the blossoming girls, who followed the only profession where both sexes are equally necessary, their lives were subject to the same misfortunes that burdened their hardier associates. Their vanity was no worse than man's conceit, their frailty was more than equalled by the coarser misconduct of men, and their good women virtuous amid temptation, were more deserving of admiration than the most proper of men. If the actor's lot was far from happy, that of the actress was even less so; compelled to earn her livelihood amid the rough social atmos-

phere of the theatre, dependent to a galling extent on the favors of managers, exiled from the protection of the home circle, was it any wonder that some of the women were corrupt and hardened? Was it not a greater wonder that in the midst of such a life so many preserved their best qualities and presented a charming picture of womanly courage and independence?

## CHAPTER X.

"To amuse respectable people, what a strange task!"—MOLIÈRE.

"As some men invent a language for their ideas, so these act and mimic them; theatrical imitation and figured representation is their genuine speech,—they cut life into scenes, and carry it piecemeal on the boards."—TAINÉ on the Elizabethan Dramatists.

"Of all the cants which are canted in this canting world—though the cant of hypocrites may be the worst, the cant of criticism is the most tormenting."—STERNE.

"Some critics are like chimney-sweepers: they put out the fire below, or frighten the swallows from their nests above; they scrape a long time in the chimney, cover themselves with soot, and bring nothing away but a bag of cinders, and then sing from the top of the house as if they had built it."—LONGFELLOW.

IN looking over the American dramatist's work, we notice that realism was aimed at more than idealism, and that the skill of the playwright flourished, while the literary art of the play-writer languished.

Constructive power was more fruitful than creative power, and while plays had grown more natural in their imitation of modern life, dramatic literature had declined, and the drawing of prominent characters was very limited.

The chief literary productions were Bird's "Gladiator," brought out by Forrest, and later Boker's "Francesca da Rimini," presented by Lawrence Barrett.

As to character creations, the great actors were not as well supplied with fine parts as some of the earlier English actors. Macready had Bulwer to give him a Richelieu and a Claude Melnotte, and Knowles to furnish him with a Virginius, while Phelps had at least inspired Taylor's Bertuccio. In America there were indeed two important characters created, one in heroic tragedy, the other in ideal domestic comedy; these were Bird's "Spartacus" for Forrest, and Boucicault's "Rip Van Winkle" for Jefferson. The greatest actor, Edwin Booth, did not have in his general repertoire a single prominent character by an American dramatist, and only in Shakespeare and other English writers could he find parts worthy of his genius.

While the literary quality was almost entirely neglected, there was fine talent displayed in construction, plot, situation, etc., and some excellent plays written; probably the three most eminent examples were Bronson Howard's charming comedy "The Henrietta," Wm. Gillette's stirring war drama, "Held by the Enemy," and Belasco and De Mille's natural society play "The Wife." As to intense emotional drama, nothing had been produced equal to the English "Jim, the Penman," by Young, or the French "Fedora," by Sardou. Perhaps the most valuable non-literary creations, because of their distinct American tone, were "The Old Homestead," by Denman Thompson and George Ryer, "The County Fair," by Charles Barnard and Neil Burgess, some of Chas. H. Hoyt's farces, and those excellent pictures of New York low life by Ned Harrigan.\* The many poor plays produced were chiefly written for actors with more personality than dramatic ability, who having made a popular "hit" launched forth as "stars" and imagined they could carry a play if they had the important part. The result was that many "one-part" plays were written, in which the chief character was considered at the expense of the play's general strength and harmony.†

While the quality of plays was very creditable to the American dramatist, the quantity was discouragingly small. Though many plays were written, only a very few were produced or given a trial, and there seemed to be but a handful of able dramatists, because the plays written were generally subjected to the criticism of reading, instead of the true test offered by actual production. The business system of individual endeavor made the production of a play an expensive affair, and

---

\* "We believe that a national drama can arise with us only as it has arisen with other peoples; that is, out of some such wilding native growths as these authors are cultivating."—W. D. HOWELLS in *Harper's*.

† "It is no particular credit to a man to have a personality which interests and amuses people, and about which any journeyman playwright can build a structure of situations and climaxes. Such a conception of his art, however, is only too common with the actor of to-day. It is easy to see the effect of the theory that the actor is everything and the play is nothing upon the dramatic literature of the day. No one need be surprised to find plays written to order lacking in inspiration. When the writer is thinking only of his "star," how can he escape throwing his ideas of artistic unity to the winds? The modern drama, for the most part, is developed from without rather than from within; it exists to display personal characteristics, to utilize situations of scenic rather than dramatic value. As a natural consequence, those playwrights who have really contributed anything to the literature of the stage within the past two decades may almost be counted upon the fingers of one hand."—EDWARD FULLER in the *Dramatic Mirror*.

usually a new dramatist, if he wished to produce his play, had to furnish the necessary capital, and assume the financial risk, and as most of the play-writers had no money to invest, so their plays remained unproduced. On account of the difficulty of bringing a play before the public, many talented writers exercised their abilities in literature or journalism, instead of spending their time in writing plays that had so little chance of obtaining a hearing.

When indeed a play was produced with success, it frequently happened in the course of business transactions that early in the career of the play its ownership would pass from the author to some enterprising manager, and in the great financial returns of such plays, the author's share of the profits was comparatively small.

Having spoken of theatres and managers, of actors and their art, of dramatists and plays, we must not forget the critics, their judgment that instructs, their censure that destroys, their praise that encourages. To criticise actors in our midst, like all criticism of living men, is a difficult, delicate, and usually a thankless task, and to criticise a play on which the reputation and fortune of dramatist, actor and manager almost depends, is certainly a very important and responsible piece of work.

The newspapers with their vast circulation were the chief mediums of criticism on plays and actors, and the general public was influenced to a great extent by the voice of the press. It was therefore necessary that the critics employed by the newspapers should possess, above all things, liberty to express their honest opinions, ability and knowledge to treat the subject, and a reasonable time to reflect on their impressions. Yet in these three requisites the critics were for the most part deficient, and as a result much of the criticism indulged in was untrue by necessity, valueless through ignorance, immature and uncertain because of haste in its treatment.

The first of these deficiencies existed in most of the smaller towns, where the owners of newspapers regarded their theatrical advertisements as an important item of revenue, and to secure the continuance of this revenue they catered to the manager of the theatre by generally praising his attractions. Their critics were ordered to "write up a good notice," and hampered with such instructions, they were of course not at liberty to express their honest opinions. In the large cities



many of the great newspapers were too powerful and independent to resort to such dishonesty, but even there certain unscrupulous journals were guilty of the same fault, and much supposedly honest criticism was paid for by the managers.

The second cause for dissatisfaction with the prevailing writings of critics was the ignorance and unfitness of many engaged in the work; only the best newspapers employed men who made the art of criticism their sole study and occupation, and a great amount of the comment on theatrical productions emanated from the average reporters of the press, who were clever enough to take down the events of the day and help to furnish general information for the public, though they were far from possessing the ability to pronounce judgment on works of art.\*

The third evil in the department of criticism was the insufficient time allowed for mental digestion, for the recovery from uncertain immediate impressions, and for the sober reflection absolutely necessary to the critic. He was compelled to express his views often within an hour after having been presented with the subject of criticism, and under such conditions it was almost impossible to be thorough in his work. Though generally protested against,† the practice was apparently unavoidable, as all the newspapers were expected to be ready with their criticism the morning after a performance, and no single paper could afford to lag behind its contemporaries. Probably the most valuable criticisms were those which appeared in magazines, some time after the first performance of a play. The critics connected with such publications had not only the advantage of sufficient time for their work, but also the opportunity to witness the subject of their criticism under more favorable conditions, after the nervousness and unevenness of a "first night" had passed away.

---

\* "The persons whom I blame for the present condition of theatrical criticism are the proprietors of most of the newspapers. They profess to require intelligence and integrity, and they will not pay the salaries which these qualities are worth. To them any raw reporter is expert enough to pronounce judgment upon a play upon which \$10,000 has been expended, or an actor who has studied hard for years."—STEPHEN FISKE in the *Dramatic Mirror*.

† "It is time to protest against that system, born no doubt of exag erated American enterprise, which enforces the writer for a newspaper in the hurried space of a few minutes, to inwardly digest and then review, not only the many years' work of the writer, but the absolute capabilities of the artist."—SYDNEY ROSENFELD.

## CHAPTER XI.

"When the necessity of daily labor is removed, and the call of social duty fulfilled, that of moderate and timely amusement claims its place as a want inherent in our nature."—WALTER SCOTT.

BEFORE concluding the comments on the stage of 1890, it will not be amiss to briefly consider the patrons of the stage, the theatre-going public, the people who paid to be entertained and perchance instructed by the art of the actor and dramatist. We have said that the theatre was but meagrely attended, and that as the ancient theatre appealed to the masses, the modern theatre depended on the patronage of the few. The Greeks paid a low price for their amusements and attended the theatre generally; the moderns paid a high price for their amusements and attended the theatre but rarely.

There seems to be no other apparent reason, except this difference in the cost of art, why both Greeks and moderns should not have patronized art alike, unless we conclude that the Greeks were more civilized. This, however, is doubtful, and though we must recognize that the Greeks were highly cultured and produced many masterpieces of art, it does not seem possible that as a race they were superior to the American people of 1890, with their great daily newspapers and all the scientific inventions of the nineteenth century.

We might indeed attribute the non-encouragement of art to lack of culture, if we were considering Shakespeare's period. At that time the masses were illiterate, rude and warlike, printing was in its infancy and modern civilization had hardly begun to spread itself.

Yet even in Shakespeare's time, in spite of Puritanical opposition, and with little intelligence to appeal to, the theatre at low prices of admission was encouraged by an attendance considerably greater than in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The historian Taine tells us: "There were already seven theatres in London in Shakespeare's time, so brisk and universal was the taste for dramatic representation." As the popula-

tion of London in 1600 was about 175,000, this would indicate one theatre for every 25,000 inhabitants, while New York in 1890 with a population of 1,600,000 had 25 theatres, or one for every 64,000 inhabitants. As to the quality of theatre-goers in 1890, if the general taste was not very high or delicate, it was still on a level with the average quality of the performances given. The appreciation of art was not confined to the so-called "high class" of theatre-goers; it also existed among the "lower classes" (called "low" presumably because they paid a lower price for their seats).

As there were intelligent persons in the orchestra chairs who were quick to detect a fine touch by the actor, so there were enthusiastic persons in the family circle who were as quick to applaud a noble sentiment, and as there were nabobs who chatted in their boxes during a performance so there were dolts in the gallery who preferred buffoonery to comedy, and noisy rant to earnest naturalness. The people were fond of the theatre, it was considered a most sensible amusement, and the old prejudice against it had almost entirely died out. A clergyman in 1889 in his sermon echoed the opinion of many who regarded the church and stage with equal approval: "Anything that adds to the sum of human happiness, scattering the clouds of weariness and gloom, brightening the tedious hours of a hard and toilsome existence, is right. The theatre is a necessity in the social life of the people." Yet this theatre which the clergyman pronounced a necessity in the social life of the people, was so expensive as to be indulged in very rarely if at all by the great army of wage-workers, who could only afford a small outlay for pleasure. But as Scott said, "amusement is a want inherent in our nature," and the masses sought to "scatter the clouds of weariness and gloom" in the saloon, where the pleasures of drink were to be had at a low price. Had theatrical entertainment been as cheap as the drinking pleasure, the theatre might have been a rival of the saloon, and drunkenness would certainly have been less common. That it was a very insignificant rival is evident when we observe the immense sum expended for that poison so pleasant in its taste and temporary effect, so fearful in its influence and final result.

There was expended by the people of the United States in 1889 the sum of \$975,000,000 for alcoholic beverages, making an average in a population of 60,000,000 of \$16.25 for each inhabitant. While 25 cents were paid into the theatres, \$16.25



were spent in saloons, the people giving 65 times as much money for the injurious pleasures of the drinking habit as for the beneficial pleasures of art.

The liquor traffic seemed to be as strong as ever, and prohibition or high-license advocates fought against it in vain. Gladstone pronounced it "worse than war, pestilence and famine combined." Lord Randolph Churchill termed it "the destructive, devilish liquor traffic," and Powderly said: "It is the one reason why the laboring man does not advance himself."

## CHAPTER XII.

"Man must pass from old to new, from vain to real, from mistake to fact; from what once seemed good, to what now proves best. How could man have progression otherwise?"—BROWNING.

"The theatre is irresistible; organize the theatre! We have in England everything to make us dissatisfied with the chaotic and ineffective condition into which our theatre has fallen. We have good actors not a few at the present moment. But we have been unlucky in the work of organization. Forget your clap-trap, and believe that the state does well to concern itself about an influence so important to national life and manners as the theatre. Form a company out of the materials ready to your hand in your many good actors. Let the conditions be that a repertory is agreed upon, taken out of the works of Shakespeare and out of the volumes of the modern drama, and that pieces from this repertory are played a certain number of times in each season. Let a school of dramatic elocution and declamation be instituted in connection with your company; it may surprise you to hear that elocution and declamation are things to be taught and learned, and do not come by nature, but it is so. The people will have the theatre, then make it a good one. Let your chief provincial towns institute theatres such as you institute in the metropolis. So you will restore the theatre, and then a modern drama of your own will also, probably, spring up among you."—MATTHEW ARNOLD.

WE now approach the new and present state of affairs, how it came to be adopted, and the results it has obtained.

In March, 1890, theatrical business was very discouraging; the season was generally pronounced the worst ever experienced; many managers had lost money and were in debt; many actors were out of employment or not receiving their salaries when due. It was not at all unusual to read an item such as this, which appeared in the Chicago correspondence of the *New York Dramatic Mirror* of March 15th, 1890: "There are now about eight dramatic companies 'resting' here, waiting for Lent to end. Business on the road was so bad that travelling expenses were not made, let alone salaries."

In April, 1890, toward the close of the season, a meeting took place in one of the New York theatres, to which all members of the profession were invited; the purpose of this gathering was to discuss the existing evils that caused the depression in business, and to suggest an entire change in the method of providing amusement for the people.

An address was delivered at this meeting, and though it was not an eloquent oration, it resulted in the adoption of the present system of theatrical business. The name of the speaker has escaped us, but he was no doubt one of the 5,000 mentioned in the preceding chapters of this book.

The speech was as follows:

“Ladies and gentlemen of the theatrical profession:

“I intend to present for your consideration a plan which has for its object the improvement socially, artistically, and financially of all those engaged in the occupation of providing polished amusement for the people, and which also proposes a method whereby the theatre will have a much broader field and a decidedly more extensive influence than it has enjoyed heretofore. We are all single-handed now, each of us struggling for the great necessity, bread, and a few for something higher than mere physical needs. Though we use no sword or cannon, though no bloodshed is visible, we are notwithstanding at war with one another, striving separately for individual benefits, instead of together for the common good of each other, and the progress of the cause we are disciples of.

“We have been working under a false system which enriches a few and impoverishes many, which is injuring the dramatic art and withholding from its followers the opportunity of education and development, and which makes the actor a homeless wanderer and a social outcast. You must all recognize that these are serious grievances, and if they really exist, it is absolutely necessary that we should seek to remove them. I will endeavor to make clear to you that these grievances do exist.

“Firstly, let us consider the financial condition of the actor. The public paid during the last year \$15,000,000 for theatrical amusements, and our expense for rental of theatres, etc., railroad transportation, advertising, etc., amounted to \$9,000,000, leaving \$6,000,000 for the services of actors and managers. Out of this balance, \$2,000,000 were paid to forty of our leading lights, and the remaining \$4,000,000 were divided among the other 5,100 persons who comprise the theatrical profession. The average income of each amounted to \$15.08 for each week of the year, but when we consider that the majority in this working force provided their own tools, in the shape of costumes, wigs, make-up, etc., and that by the travelling system their living expenses were higher than if they had been located in one place, it will be consistent to estimate the weekly

income of each person at \$12, or \$624 yearly. Do you think that is a high salary for men and women who practise a noble, difficult art, for which nature only favors a few?

"Secondly, we will look at our artistic condition. We have among us several hundred capable artists, who shine brilliantly because they are exceptions to the rule. The majority are mediocre, crude in skill, uneven in talent, limited in their efforts. What is the cause of this pitiful condition of art? The answer is simple enough. We are not taught how to practise our art, we have no system of education, and each of us is left in feeble single-handedness to gather what pearls of knowledge we can find.

The doctor and lawyer, as well as the mechanic, have the advantages of some preparatory education, but we who practise an art that appeals to 20,000,000 people annually, are left to shift for ourselves, and learn without a school. If actual work on a certain subject is the best mode of instruction, how can the young actor of to-day master his art, when his work is confined to a single part during an entire season? The practice that he needs for his education is withheld from him by a stupid system adopted for present financial profit and artistic loss, and future financial loss and artistic ruin.

"Thirdly, we will consider our social condition, that part of our life which concerns our personal happiness, our minds and morals. Can you possibly delude yourselves with the idea that you are enjoying a healthy, sensible existence, when the nature of your occupation deprives you of a home, of social intercourse with the world? Are you not all wanderers during eight months of the year, living in hotels and railroad cars among strangers, separated from those dearest to you? The husband, wife, children and home that make the sunshine of life, are impossible among a class of people who with few exceptions are compelled to travel about the country like a tribe of gypsies. Suppose, then, you realize all these sad conditions, the remedy for their cure seems still beyond you. But if you will think, and have the courage to act, the remedy is close at hand.

"1. We must reduce the prices in our theatres, and gain the patronage of the masses instead of depending on the luxurious few. By doing this the dramatic art will grow much more extensive in its influence, and more profitable to its followers.

"2. We must abandon the travelling system and make all companies with a few exceptions stationary. This will cause a

saving of \$500,000 for railroad expenses, and of another \$500,000 in the personal living expenses of the profession. Aside from this financial benefit, there will be an artistic gain, caused by the repertoire of stationary companies, which will give an actor the opportunity to play a dozen parts during the season instead of only one part, and which will give him a higher ambition and a theatrical education to aid and promote his artistic development. Lastly, the actor will gain socially and morally; by living in one place, he can enjoy the benefits of domestic life, he can found a home and family, and he can become a citizen and resident, instead of what he is now, an exile and a wanderer.

"3. We must reduce the high rental of theatres, which enriches the real estate owner, makes dear to the public the cost of art, and lowers the income of actors and managers.

"4. We must remove that system of individualism which enables forty of our leading lights to receive an average of \$50,000 each for their services during a season, while the remaining 5,000 of us receive only \$784 each for the same length of service.

"5. The profits of the theatrical business must be shared among all the actors, actresses and managers, each one's share to be in accordance with the value of the service rendered, that service to be appraised according to a salary list ranging from not less than \$15 per week for the least capable, to not more than \$500 per week for the most capable. By this division and limitation of salaries, all of us with a few notable exceptions will be benefited financially, and a general interest and nobler ambition will be aroused throughout the profession.

"6. A training school must be established for the preparatory education of those who enter our profession, and to protect our working force against overcrowding, the school to be supported by the profession and regarded as a necessary expense. By the establishment of this school, we will not only adopt an educational system, the artistic value of which has been demonstrated by the great theatres of Europe, but we make its doors the only means of entering our field, and the supply of new material will be regulated according to the demand.

"I have now mentioned the chief remedies for the evils that exist among us. If then you feel that it is necessary to reduce the prices of admission, to abandon the travelling system, and



to lower the rental of our theatres, and if you feel that it is right to protest against monopoly, to let each actor, actress and manager share in the profits according to a just value of service rendered, to establish a training school which will not only be an educational institute, but also a protection against the overcrowding of our profession—if, I say, you recognize the expediency and justice of all this, the question arises, how can it be accomplished?

“I answer you with one word, co-operation. In that word many virtues abide: peace, happiness, justice, progress, strength, wisdom, and love.

“In Bellamy’s ‘Looking Backward’ the effects of co-operation are clearly explained, and that noble book proves how, if the idea were adopted and acted upon, it would make our nation prosperous and happy. But the realization of Bellamy’s dream seems almost impossible, because it concerns 60,000,000 people who are now divided in many classes, engaged in various occupations, hopelessly entangled in the struggle of the few intelligent against the many ignorant, and the many poor and weak against the few wealthy and powerful. And yet, some of our wisest men believe that the desired and necessary harmony will be attained, though it may require a hundred years.

“If then the faintest shadow of possibility exists that these 60,000,000 will adopt a system of co-operation, ought it not to be a comparatively easy task to bring about the co-operation of a mere handful of 5,000 men and women? And as great reforms have small beginnings and gradually grow, so our co-operation will have its influence on the world at large. As Bellamy says: ‘Even a single industry organized on such a basis as described, and guaranteeing to its toilers security, health, safety, dignity and justice, would be an object lesson which would greatly hasten the general adoption of the system.’

“What does co-operation mean as applied to our profession? It means 5,000 persons working under the control of one management, instead of 5,000 persons divided among 300 different managements. It means that we will work together for the benefit of all, instead of separately for the benefit of the few. Let our one management consist of a president and board of directors composed of our most eminent and honorable managers, and intrust them with the authority to select and arrange the working force.

“Let them form stationary companies, providing them each



with a stock of entertainment out of the possessions on hand. Decide upon the reduced price of admission, and with the exception of a few special companies, have it apply to every company throughout the country. But all this will be understood and ably handled by our best managers, if we will stand together, and agree to co-operate in our work. I leave you to reflect on this idea, so simple in itself, yet so grand in its possible results.

"I submit to you the remedy which, if acted upon, will increase your worldly possessions, improve you as artists, and make you happier men and women. If you are weak and fearful now, if you have no ambition to rise beyond your sphere, if you think that single-handed struggling is better than brotherly co-operative work, then my speech to you to-day has been a mistake.

"But if you have eyes that see and hearts that feel the justice and truth of co-operation, then I am certain that better days are in store for us, for I know you will not hesitate to accomplish what lies before you."

## CHAPTER XIII.

"Then went the jury out, whose names were Mr. Blindman, Mr. No-Good, Mr. Liar, Mr. Cruelty, Mr. Hate-light, Mr. Implacable, who every one gave in his verdict against him."—BUNYAN'S "Pilgrim's Progress."

"The perception of truths is disturbed by many causes—vanity, passion, fear, indolence in himself, ignorance of the fitting means to accomplish what he designs."—BULWER-LYTTON.

"A plain truth may be so worried and mauled by fallacies as to get the worst of it."—GEORGE ELIOT.

"Man is and always will be a blockhead and dullard ; much readier to feel and digest, than to think and consider. Prejudice, which he pretends to hate, is his absolute law-giver ; mere use and wont everywhere lead him by the nose."—CARLYLE.

"We do not take possession of our ideas, but are possessed of them.  
They master us and force us into the arena,  
Where like gladiators we must fight for them."—HEINE.

"Cowardice asks, Is it safe ? Expediency asks, Is it politic ? Vanity asks, Is it popular ? but Conscience asks, Is it right ?"—PUNSHON.

THE majority of actors and managers were in favor of this proposed co-operation ; they felt it was at least worthy of a trial, and that the result could hardly be worse than their present condition, while it was very possible that their personal fortunes and well-being would be vastly improved. But while many welcomed it as the first ray of sunshine which was to brighten the gloom and relieve the distress of theatrical business, there were others who were indifferent to it, and some who were opposed to it. Certain managers and "stars" were enjoying a larger income than the highest salary to be allowed by the system of co-operation (\$500 per week), and it was natural that they should prefer the old system of individual endeavor which secured them such high financial rewards. But there were also among these some generous and broad-minded men who, having already amassed considerable fortunes, were willing to accept a smaller return for their future services, when by doing so they would benefit their fellow-men, and help to elevate and extend the profession and the art.

Others opposed or indifferent were some of those few who were well situated, and satisfied to leave things as they were; indolent actors who were averse to the "stock" system because it entailed more work; timid actors and managers who held aloof without expressing their opinions; and selfish men and women who preferred individualism to fraternity.

The majority in favor of the idea was, nevertheless, too large to be affected by a comparatively small opposition, and as the opposition easily perceived that strife would be useless, the co-operation became general.

It was determined then to establish the present Amusement Guild, under whose government all members of the profession placed themselves.

The chief officer of the guild, and the head of the managerial department, was the president chosen by a general election, whose term of office was limited to four years, with the privilege of re-election.

The nominees for this important position could only consist of those few managers who stood at the head of the profession, and who by their experience and ability had proven their fitness for the office. The president, and the cabinet or staff of officers he selected, were intrusted with the distribution and management of the working force, and our next chapter will narrate the extent of their work, and the various beneficial changes they effected.

## CHAPTER XIV.

“Build to-day, then, strong and sure,  
With a firm and ample base ;  
And ascending and secure  
Shall to-morrow find its place.”—LONGFELLOW.

THOUGH the president and board of directors with their assistants had before them a work of great magnitude, they possessed the advantages of a complete survey of the field, absolute control of the entire theatrical business, and no competition to thwart their efforts. It would be tedious to describe in detail the extent of their work, and we will confine ourselves to the important features. The working force was divided into 250 companies averaging each about 20 persons (11 actors, 7 actresses, 1 manager, 1 assistant manager), amounting to 5,000 persons who formerly composed 300 companies. In this way the artistic strength of the average company was increased, and the supply of amusements was reduced to the extent of 50 companies. The prices of admission were lowered about one-half, causing a much more numerous attendance; with the supply reduced, and the demand increased, it was calculated that the theatres in which the 250 companies played, would be easily filled during 40 weeks of the year.

The division of these companies, and the prices they played at, were as follows: 5 special stock companies. These were situated two in New York, one in Philadelphia, one in Chicago, and one in Boston. The prices were 25, 50, 75 cents and \$1. These five companies were composed of the best elements in the four stock companies that formerly existed, with additional strength.

Ten special star companies, at the head of which were placed the greatest and most famous of the “stars.” They travelled and played in the larger cities, at the same prices as the special stock companies (25, 50, 75 cents and \$1).

Twenty-five star companies, at the head of which were placed the best and most successful of the lesser “stars.” They travelled, playing in large cities and smaller towns at 25, 35 and 50 cents.

Thirty-five travelling repertoire companies. These appeared only in those smaller towns where there was no stock company. They were each furnished with a repertory of 10 plays, and their stay in a town was for one to three nights. Five of these companies with 50 different plays were given a "circuit" to which their travels were confined during a season, and these five companies alone furnished the entertainment for this "circuit." Seven of these "circuits" included all the smaller towns in the United States worth visiting. The prices were 15, 25 and 35 cents. We have mentioned 75 companies, 35 of which were travellers over large circuits, 35 over small circuits, and 5 stationary. The remaining 175 were stock companies, 75 of which played at 25, 35 and 50 cents, and 100 at 15, 25 and 35 cents. These 175 companies were located in the following cities:

New York (20 companies), Brooklyn (10), Buffalo (3), Albany (2), Rochester (2), Syracuse (1), Troy (1), Philadelphia, Pa. (12), Pittsburgh (4), Jersey City, N. J. (2), Newark (2), Wilmington, Del. (1), Boston, Mass. (10), Lowell (1), Lynn (1), Springfield (1), Worcester (1), New Haven, Conn. (2), Hartford (1), Providence, R. I. (2), Montreal, Can. (2), Toronto (2), Baltimore, Md. (5), Washington, D. C. (2), Wheeling, W. Va. (1), Savannah, Ga. (1), Atlanta, Ga. (1), Charleston, S. C. (1), Mobile, Ala. (1), Richmond, Va. (1), New Orleans, La. (5), Galveston, Texas (1), San Antonio (1), Memphis, Tenn. (1), Nashville (1), St. Louis, Mo. (5), Kansas City (3), Cincinnati, Ohio (5), Cleveland (4), Columbus (2), Dayton (1), Toledo (1), Chicago, Ill. (15), Peoria (1), Detroit, Mich. (3), Grand Rapids (1), Milwaukee, Wis. (2), Minneapolis, Minn. (3), St. Paul (2), Indianapolis, Ind. (2), Evansville (1), Fort Wayne (1), Terre Haute (1), Louisville, Ky. (2), Burlington, Iowa (1), Des Moines (1), Omaha, Neb. (1), Helena, Mon. (1), Denver, Col. (2), San Francisco, Cal. (5), Los Angeles (1), Sacramento (1), Seattle, Wash. (1), Portland, Ore. (1). Total, 175 companies.

The theatres to be occupied by the 250 companies for an average of 40 weeks during the year, were rented by the guild; as to the stock of entertainment, all plays, etc., were placed under the management of the guild at a royalty of \$50 per week from each company which made use of them, to be paid to those managers, dramatists or actors who owned them. In the concluding four chapters of this book we will speak of the results of the guild system, financially, artistically, and socially, and of its general benefit to the public.

## CHAPTER XV.

"What is here ? Gold ? yellow, glittering, precious gold ?"—SHAKESPEARE.

"A penny saved is a penny gained."—FRANKLIN.

IN noting that the gross receipts during the year 1891 were very much more than in 1889, the reader must bear in mind, that while such a large increase would have seemed strange under the old system, it was perfectly natural under the improved conditions of the guild. All companies were now under first-class management, working under wise direction, situated so as not to clash with or injure one another; by having the entire theatrical force under good management, this force became more valuable financially than it had been.

Another cause for the increased receipts was the employment of the working force during 40 weeks in the year, instead of as formerly during 30 weeks; this longer season was made possible by the more general patronage of theatres at reduced prices, and the attendance of many who formerly did not go to the theatre at all because of the high prices.

The gross receipts of the 250 companies in 1891 were as follows :

5 special stock companies, prices 25, 50, 75 cents and \$1, average \$6,000 weekly for 40 weeks, . . .	\$1,200,000
10 special star companies, prices 25, 50, 75 cents and \$1, average \$6,000 weekly for 40 weeks, . . .	2,400,000
75 stock companies, prices 25, 35 and 50 cents, aver- age \$3,000 weekly for 40 weeks, . . . . .	9,000,000
25 star companies, prices 25, 35 and 50 cents, average \$3,000 weekly for 40 weeks, . . . . .	3,000,000
100 stock companies, prices 15, 25 and 35 cents, aver- age \$2,000 weekly for 40 weeks, . . . . .	8,000,000
35 small town travelling repertoire companies, prices 15, 25 and 35 cents, average \$2,000 weekly for 40 weeks, . . . . .	2,800,000
250 companies' gross receipts, . . . . .	<u>\$26,400,000</u>



The expenses for 1891 were as follows:

1. Actors' salaries: 4,500 actors, composing 250 companies, employed 40 weeks:

10 special stars, \$500 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	\$200,000
25 stars, \$300 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	300,000
250 leading men, \$60, \$75, \$100, \$125, \$150, \$200, average \$100 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	1,000,000
250 juvenile men, \$40, \$50, \$75, \$100, \$125, average \$75 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	750,000
250 comedians, average \$75 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	750,000
250 heavy men, average \$60 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	600,000
250 character actors, average \$60 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	600,000
250 old men, average \$60 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	600,000
250 stage managers, average \$60 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	600,000
250 miscellaneous responsible actors, average \$40 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	400,000
715 utility men, average \$25 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	715,000
250 leading ladies, average \$100 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	1,000,000
250 juvenile ladies, average \$75 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	750,000
250 comediennes, average \$75 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	750,000
250 character actresses, average \$60 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	600,000
250 old ladies, average \$60 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	600,000
250 miscellaneous responsible, average \$40 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	400,000
250 utility ladies, average \$25 per week for 40 weeks, . . . . .	250,000
4,500 actors. . . . .	Salaries, \$10,865,000

2. Musicians' salaries: The average amount paid for orchestras in theatres, was \$250 weekly by each company during 40 weeks, making a total of \$2,500,000. This was considerably more than had been formerly expended, and permitted the orchestras in the average theatres to be improved and strengthened.

3. Salaries and expense of the guild board of directors:

President, . . . . .	\$20,000
Vice-president, . . . . .	8,000
Director of theatrical productions, . . . . .	15,000

Assistant director of theatrical productions, . . .	\$8,000
Director of actors and managers, . . . . .	15,000
Assistant director of actors and managers, . . .	8,000
Directors of travelling attractions, . . . . .	15,000
Assistant director of travelling attractions, . . .	8,000
Director of foreign affairs, . . . . .	10,000
Assistant director of foreign affairs, . . . . .	6,000
Treasurer, . . . . .	10,000
Assistant treasurer, . . . . .	6,000
Secretary, . . . . .	10,000
Assistant secretary, . . . . .	6,000
Censor of plays, . . . . .	8,000
Assistant censor of plays, . . . . .	5,000
Legal representative, . . . . .	10,000
Rental of the Guild building, . . . . .	10,000
Clerks, stenographers, etc., . . . . .	20,000
Miscellaneous expenses, . . . . .	2,000
Total, . . . . .	<hr/> \$200,000

4. Salaries of managers: Each company had its manager, who was paid in accordance with the importance of his work. His salary averaged about the same as that of a leading man. Thus 250 managers at \$100 per week for 40 weeks received \$1,000,000. There were also 350 assistant managers and agents, average salary \$50 per week during 40 weeks, \$700,000.

#### 5. Expense of the protective training school:

Rent, . . . . .	\$20,000
Director's salary, . . . . .	5,000
Corps of instructors:	
5 stage managers at \$3,000, . . . . .	15,000
5 experienced actors (tragedian, comedian, society actor, melo-dramatic actor, operatic comedian) at \$3,000, . . . . .	15,000
3 teachers of elocution and vocal expression at \$3,000, . . . . .	9,000
2 teachers of pantomime at \$3,000, . . . . .	6,000
2 fencing masters at \$3,000, . . . . .	6,000
2 dancing masters at \$3,000, . . . . .	6,000
2 teachers of athletics and gymnastics at \$3,000, . . . . .	6,000
1 professor of dramatic literature, . . . . .	3,000
Various employees, . . . . .	6,000
Miscellaneous, . . . . .	3,000
Total, . . . . .	<hr/> \$100,000

6. Salaries of 200 student actors at \$15 each during 40 weeks, \$120,000. These were the pupils of the training school, who were used as supernumeraries in the best theatres of New York and Brooklyn. By thus enabling the students to support themselves during their educational term, it was impossible for any dramatic talent to be excluded by poverty.

7. Scenic artists, scenery and properties: 250 companies averaging \$100 each during 40 weeks, \$1,000,000. By this liberal allowance, the stages were tastefully and appropriately dressed, while extreme scenic display was avoided.

8. Stage carpenters, scene shifters, gas men, janitors, call boys, etc.: 250 companies averaging \$100 each during 40 weeks, \$1,000,000.

9. Ushers: 250 companies averaging \$75 each during 40 weeks, \$750,000.

10. Royalties on plays, etc.: About 25 of the star and stock companies produced "legitimate" and certain standard plays on which there were no royalties. Two hundred and twenty-five companies paid \$50 each during 40 weeks, \$450,000. The fixed royalty of \$50 per week, or \$6.25 for each of 8 performances, was apparently small, though a successful play at this royalty was very remunerative to the owner. Formerly a successful play would be presented by two companies about 600 times during a season. The guild with its many stock companies throughout the country, and by the increased attendance through cheap prices, was enabled to present a successful play profitably at least 3,000 times during a season. At \$6.25 for each performance, the author or owner thus received \$18,750.

11. Rental of theatres, insurance and repairs: As there were only 250 companies instead of 300, it will be seen that the guild did not need to rent all theatres, because they were not needed. As some theatres could be dispensed with entirely, the owners found it necessary to make their rental more moderate, and though this caused a loss to certain wealthy property owners, the guild saved some \$500,000 by a lowering of about 15% in this important item of expense. The 250 companies paid for rent, insurance, and repairs, an average of \$12,000 each per year, \$3,000,000.

12. Light and heat in theatres. 250 companies paid \$370,000, or an average of about \$1,500 each.

13. Supernumeraries: In New York and Brooklyn the training school furnished many of the "supers" and at least 50

companies used none at all. The other 200 companies averaged \$600 each, \$120,000. As the companies averaged 18 actors each, the utility men often did "silent" work which had been formerly intrusted to awkward, ill-featured "supers." This change was a great relief to the audience.

14. Advertising: As there was no more competition among companies, this expense was greatly reduced, advertising being now indulged in not as a piece of business enterprise, but as a means of informing the public about the various entertainments, their nature, the prices of admission, etc. The newspapers were the chief agents of this information, while the old custom of displaying show-bills and pictorial printing was almost entirely abandoned. It was found that \$25 per week covered the cost of all necessary advertising for one company, which made the expense of 250 companies during 40 weeks \$250,000.

15. Railroad fare, etc.: Instead of almost 300 companies travelling, there were now only 70. Of these 35 travelled over the entire country, and some remained 4 weeks or more in large cities. The 35 small-town companies had each a limited "circuit." The average railroad expense of these 70 companies amounted to \$50 each during 40 weeks, \$140,000.

16. Theatrical license: 250 companies averaging each \$200, \$50,000.

17. Miscellaneous, \$50,000.

#### Recapitulation of expenses

Salaries of 4,500 actors, . . . . .	\$10,865,000
Salaries of musicians, . . . . .	2,500,000
Salary list of president, board of directors, etc., with rental of guild building, . . . . .	200,000
Salaries of 250 managers, . . . . .	1,000,000
Salaries of 350 assistant managers, etc., . . . . .	700,000
Salaries of 200 student actors, . . . . .	120,000
Expense of training school, . . . . .	100,000
Scenic artists, scenery and properties, . . . . .	1,000,000
Stage hands, etc., . . . . .	1,000,000
Ushers, . . . . .	750,000
Royalties on plays, etc., . . . . .	450,000
Rental of theatres, insurance, and repairs, . . . . .	3,000,000
Light and heat in theatres, . . . . .	370,000
Supernumeraries, . . . . .	120,000
Advertising, . . . . .	250,000

Railroad expense, . . . . .	\$140,000
Theatrical license, . . . . .	50,000
Miscellaneous, . . . . .	50,000
Total expense, . . . . .	\$22,665,000
Gross receipts, . . . . .	26,400,000
Profit, . . . . .	\$3,735,000

Salary list of actors, managers, assistant managers, president and board of directors, \$12,723,000. Dividend on this salary list with \$3,735,000 profit, about 30%. Annual earnings of 5,100 actors and managers: Salaries, \$12,723,000; profit, \$3,735,000; total, \$16,458,000. Average income of each annually, \$3,227.06; average income of each weekly throughout the year, \$62.06.

Thus we see that the 5,100 actors and managers who under the old system had an average weekly income throughout the year amounting to \$15.08 received under the new system \$62.06, a result brought about by—1. The reducing of prices and increase of public support. 2. The artistic strengthening of companies by forming 250 out of 300 companies, and the consequent decrease in supply to the extent of 50 companies. 3. A co-operation with its economical wholesale system as compared to the expensive system of individual effort. 4. A just division of the profits according to the value of services rendered.

The savings effected by the guild were very important, and of course increased the profits of actors and managers. These savings for the year 1891 were as follows:

1. Railroad expense: This was formerly, when 300 companies travelled, about \$750,000. By the new system with its 70 travelling companies and its smaller "circuits," this expense was reduced to \$140,000, causing a saving of \$610,000.

2. Cost of living: In 1890 there were some 5,000 actors and managers moving from city to city, seldom remaining in one place more than a week. It was not convenient for so short a time to find comfortable quarters except in hotels, where the charges for food and lodging were much higher than in domestic life. These 5,000 were each paying an average of \$1.50 per day, or \$10.50 weekly during 30 weeks. By the establishment of 180 stationary companies, almost 4,000 persons were enabled to secure as good board and lodging for \$7 per week, as that which had previously cost \$10.50. Thus a saving was



effected by 4,000 persons of \$3.50 per week for 30 weeks. Total, \$420,000.

3. Cost of travelling baggage, etc.: The 4,000 who had formerly travelled, were now relieved of the expense of trunks and smaller baggage. This amounted to an average of \$10 each. Total, \$40,000.

4. Advertising expense: Formerly the extensive use of lithographs, show-bills, etc., made the cost of advertising amount to \$750,000. By the almost entire abandonment of any advertising except in newspapers, the expense was reduced to \$250,000, causing a saving of \$500,000.

5. Special advertising in dramatic newspapers: Formerly considerable advertising was done in the dramatic newspapers for business purposes, which alone concerned the profession and not the public. These advertisements were about actors out of employment, etc., or about theatres and special attractions; in fact, they were all the outcome of individual endeavor. The guild required no other advertising except that which appealed to the public, and the dramatic newspapers were advertised in precisely as in other newspapers. In this way a saving of about \$50,000 was caused. This reduction in their advertising departments was a loss to the dramatic newspapers, but it was overbalanced by the gains resulting from their increased circulation. Public interest in the theatre was now greater than ever, and the dramatic papers were the best mediums of information on this subject. Actors and managers also purchased dramatic papers more generally than ever, because they were interested in the progress of a business which they were financially concerned in.

6. Rental of theatres: The saving in this expense we have previously mentioned as amounting to \$500,000.

7. Suspension of the "free list" and banishment of the "dead-head:" Formerly the "dead-head," though recognized as an expensive nuisance, was unavoidable. Free passes were given in payment of advertising privileges, and often persons were admitted to help fill the theatre, when an attraction wished to create an impression of large audiences. Actors were permitted to enter theatres without paying the price of admission, and this practice would have been laudable if it had applied to all actors; but by a politic idea of courtesy, the well-known and prosperous actors were usually welcomed, while obscure and poor actors were repelled. When the guild assumed control there were no advertising privileges needed, and the prices were



so low that actors, etc., were willing to pay and preserve their dignity instead of encouraging a false idea of courtesy, which was really more like beggary. Only critics were given seats gratis, because their presence was necessary. Formerly the value of free admissions averaged for 30 weeks about \$20 each per week for 150 companies, and \$10 each per week for 150 companies, making a total of \$135,000. By the entire abandonment of this practice, the guild virtually saved that amount.

8. Fees to dramatic agencies: This expense had been about \$20,000 annually, and was chiefly paid by actors who depended on the agencies to secure employment for them. When the guild became the sole employer, these agencies were rendered unnecessary, but the dramatic agents were employed by the guild, as their knowledge of actors' abilities, etc., was valuable in helping to distribute the working force.

#### Recapitulation of savings:

In railroad expense, . . . . .	\$610,000
In cost of living, . . . . .	420,000
In cost of travelling baggage, etc., . . . . .	40,000
In advertising expense, . . . . .	500,000
In rental of theatres, . . . . .	500,000
Special advertising in dramatic newspapers, . . . . .	50,000
Suspension of the "free list," . . . . .	135,000
Fees to dramatic agencies, . . . . .	20,000
<hr/>	
Total savings, . . . . .	\$2,275,000

Such were the magnificent financial results of combined strength and co-operative endeavor, as compared to the old system of individual effort and destructive competition.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"The world of art is an ideal world,  
The world I love, and that I fain would live in ;  
So speak to me of artists and of art."—LONGFELLOW.

THE actor now took a new interest in his work. He not only had more parts to play and a better opportunity to exercise his ability, but he felt the responsibility of being connected with a great effort, the fruits of which he would have a share in. This feeling gave more energy and earnestness to his work, and these qualities increased his artistic value. The stock companies offered so many opportunities, especially to the younger and undeveloped actors, that much talent was brought to light, the existence of which had previously been doubted. The younger actors who were in need of a varied experience were consigned to the smaller cities where there was only one stock company. In those companies it was necessary to change the bill very often; and while the experience gained was most excellent, the labor was much greater than in large cities.

The older actors in such companies were relieved after a season or two, and transferred to larger cities, where their work was lighter. All graduates of the training school were made to serve about three years in these companies, where the bill was so frequently changed; by this they gained the real education for which the school had only prepared them.

There were now no more "barn-stormers" and "play-pirates." The 35 small-town travelling companies were well equipped with the successful plays of the day, on which royalties were being paid, and they seldom visited a town of less than 10,000 inhabitants. In these smaller towns the audience was large when a performance was given, not only because the price was low and the entertainment good, but chiefly because the supply of theatricals was under sensible control, and the town was not "played to death." Formerly a town with a population of ten or fifteen thousand, was visited by two or three attractions in one week, or some ten-cent and twenty-cent rep-

ertoire company of wretched quality would remain an entire week. Under the guild management such a town was visited once a week by a well-trained repertoire company, which presented one of its plays at 15, 25 and 35 cents. The theatres in these towns being now more profitable, enabled the guild to expend some money on stage decorations and general improvements, all of which was appreciated by the public. In the larger cities an average play easily ran from two to six weeks, and a change of bill occurred about every four weeks; the reduction of prices permitted a play to be presented profitably twice as often as formerly, and in large cities like New York a successful play which formerly ran 150 nights, was now kept on for an entire season. Those companies connected with such long "runs," were used for the trial performances of new plays. When the play-reading department of the guild decided that a play was worthy of trial, it was put in rehearsal with one of the "long-run" companies, and produced (under the personal direction of the author) at a special trial *matinée*. The audience at such a *matinée* consisted only of invited guests, the newspaper critics, managers, actors, and the officers of the guild. By an agreement made with the newspapers, the criticisms on these performances were not published, but handed over to the guild; by the impression the play made on the audience, and according to the general tone of the criticisms handed in, the guild officers decided whether the play should be accepted for regular production. If the decision was favorable, the play was added to the stock of theatrical material, and placed for general use throughout the country. In this way the expensive public production of a failure was to a great extent avoided. On the public production of those plays which had passed the test of the trial *matinée*, the newspaper criticisms in large cities did not appear until a fixed period of several days after the first performance, so that the critics had more time to digest their views. This was due to another arrangement between the newspapers and the guild; the concentration of control made it possible for the guild to effect these arrangements, which would have been impossible when the theatrical business was separately conducted by various managers who did not work in concert with each other. As there were at least twenty companies in the large cities, engaged with plays having a long "run," they were able to test by this method at least a hundred new plays during a season, resulting not only in much profitable material for the

guild, but it soon disclosed the fact that America possessed more than a mere handful of dramatists.

While the domestic field was thus encouragingly cultivated, the English, French, and German dramatists were not neglected; the director of foreign affairs secured all European successes at the fixed royalty of the guild. He also made engagements with celebrated foreign artists, whom the American public wished to see, and who would prove profitable for the guild.

In addition to the regular stock of theatrical entertainment, the guild found it possible to produce many of the standard plays and successes of the past. Formerly a single company could not handle an old play advantageously, but the stock system, and the increase of theatre-goers, enabled the guild to present the best of old material and derive a profit from it.

Under the new distribution of employment the quality of acting began at once to improve; the ability of the actor was cultivated by more exercise in a varied field, and by being placed on the whole under better stage management than formerly.

Many unimportant "stars" who had been wasting their talents without profit in country towns, were made valuable use of as "leading" people, and if their names were no longer prominently displayed, they were at least relieved of their former business worriments, and assured a good salary for a long season.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"Care for one's self and one's family, anxiety as to livelihood, the strain of a ceaseless battle for life—all these influences, which once did so much to wreck the minds and bodies of men and women, are known no more."—BELLAMY.

It is gratifying to consider the social condition of the actors under the guild management, as compared to their condition under the old system. With an income increased fourfold, and with the majority living in one place instead of travelling about the country, it was not surprising that as men and women, the actors, actresses, and managers, were vastly improved. Being in a better financial state than ever before, theatrical people as a class grew to be more substantial and less improvident; the men had more dignity, the women more independence. The majority living the settled domestic life, instead of the wandering bohemian life, there was less immorality, more marriages, and more homes. Actors became citizens and acquired property which they could oversee and improve.

As the working season was now forty weeks, and as the stock system entailed more rehearsals and studious preparation, there was less idleness and dissipation among actors. After a season of hard labor and with a sure financial reward, the vacation of 10 or 12 weeks was looked forward to with pleasure; the spectacle of hundreds hanging about dramatic agencies all summer, looking for doubtful employment, was no more a blot on the dignity of the profession.

There was no discharge for incompetency or some small offence, but merely a change to a lower position, while merit was rewarded with promotion. The guild had indeed the power to discharge any person, and as this meant a complete withdrawal from the dramatic profession, it was only exercised in extreme cases, such as dishonesty in handling the funds of the guild, or constant neglect of duty.

An excellent artistic influence on actors in large cities was effected by giving matinées other than Saturday, on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. This not only was more acceptable

to the public, but it gave actors the opportunity to see each other work, which as an educational element had been denied them by the old custom of making Wednesday the general matinée day beside Saturday.

The public naturally welcomed the reduction of prices, and by its cheapness, the theatre secured the patronage of the middle and lower classes; those who formerly went once to the theatre and paid seventy-five cents, now went twice, and received double the enjoyment for the same price, while many wage-workers to whom the theatre had seemed an expensive luxury beyond their means, were now found willing to pay what they considered a reasonable price.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

"What we like determines what we are, and is the sign of what we are ; and to teach taste is inevitably to form character."—JOHN RUSKIN.

"Perhaps we may yet, when the people really come to their own, have a municipal theatre in every city and town, where the best dramas may be seen for a tenth of the price one now pays to see the worst."—W. D. HOWELLS.

IN this final chapter we will speak of the present state of affairs in the year 1900. The guild now controls the musical as well as the dramatic art, and its financial growth has been rapid and sure. So far there has been but one losing year, when the deficiency was met by a tax on the salary-list of those entitled to a share in the profits. The loss being shared by all, the burden was made comparatively easy to bear, and no one person really suffered from a disturbed and unfortunate theatrical season, which under the old methods of individualism would have thrown many out of employment, and caused much misery in the ranks of the profession.

The dramatic art is more fruitful than ever, there are more good actors than formerly, more fine plays written, and the future presents an encouraging aspect. Though we now possess a theatre in New York which is regarded as superior to any in Europe, and though the stage has a dignity and influence it never before enjoyed, it can hardly expect to attain the highest excellence for some years to come. The dramatic profession still contains many elements of the old system, when the stage was open to those without natural gifts, and when there was no education enforced. When the present generation has passed away, the stage will not contain one person who has not passed the test of ability, and who has not undergone a complete theatrical education, and it is reasonable to assume that the stage will then have attained its artistic perfection.

The educational influence of the theatre over the masses will increase as it extends. The guild expects soon to make a further reduction in the prices of admission, and though the realization of the hope Mr. Howells expressed for a really cheap theatre is still far off, we are at least approaching it.

During the last few years the liquor traffic has declined

slowly but steadily; this has been caused by the theatre as a means of recreation and pleasure being offered to the masses. The saloon no longer is the only place where the poor man can forget his cares. While prohibition sought to deprive and high license to restrict, and while both failed in their efforts, the theatre is gradually drawing the masses from the saloon to its own doors, and by substituting a healthy pleasure for an evil one, the people are being emancipated from the greatest of human vices.

In the adoption of the co-operative system by other professions and industries, and in the decline of the drinking habit, the future happiness of the race is becoming more and more possible.

Mr. Bellamy's prophecy now indeed seems reasonable, and the twentieth century will no doubt be the most important in the history of mankind.

We are sure that the golden age, not far distant, will recognize how much of its happiness and prosperity is due to the early influence and example of the American theatre.

THE END.



